

“They have no limits”: Territory, borders and inequality in the (in)tense relationship between São Conrado and Rocinha

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This article analyzes, from a historical-processual perspective, the relationship between the neighborhoods of São Conrado and Rocinha, located in the south of Rio de Janeiro. With research based on newspaper articles and a group of messages from São Conrado residents, the text reflects on the representations produced about the two neighborhoods over time, paying attention to how they produce forms of occupation and experimentation with space, at the same time as they are produced by them. This study considers the many limits of a dichotomous view of these neighborhoods, revealing the many forms of intertwining and dispute that mark the process of producing shared urban space.

Keywords: Rocinha, São Conrado, Rio de Janeiro, urban inequality, favela.

“Eles não têm limite”: território, fronteiras e desigualdade na relação (in)tensa entre São Conrado e Rocinha

Este artigo analisa, em perspectiva histórico-processual, as relações entre os bairros de São Conrado e Rocinha, situados na zona sul do município do Rio de Janeiro. Com pesquisa baseada em artigos de jornal e em grupo de mensagens de moradores de São Conrado, o texto reflete sobre as representações produzidas sobre os dois bairros ao longo de tempo, atentando-se para o modo como elas produzem formas de ocupação e experimentação do espaço, ao mesmo tempo em que são produzidas por estas. O objetivo é, com isso, pensar sobre os limites de um olhar dicotômico sobre esses bairros, revelando as muitas formas de entrelaçamento e disputa que marcam o processo de produção do espaço urbano compartilhado.

Palavras-chave: Rocinha, São Conrado, Rio de Janeiro, desigualdade urbana, favela.

Introduction

São Conrado and Rocinha are two contiguous neighbourhoods in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro city. According to the most recent official statistics, the first has an area of 648 hectares and is inhabited by 11,000 residents, while the second occupies an area of 143 hectares, inhabited by 69,000 people.¹ São Conrado overlooks the seafront and its urban development is marked by expensive apartment blocks; the Rocinha neighbourhood,² renowned as one of the country's largest favelas, stretches across one of the hills that surround São Conrado, extending as far as Gávea, another wealthy area of Rio, on the other side. Despite the accuracy of these statistics, they fail to express the social dynamics that unfold in the (in)tense relations shaping the coexistence between the two neighbourhoods. After all, as William Foote Whyte (2005: 20) cautioned in his classic study of a neighbourhood of Boston: “There is one thing wrong with this picture: no human beings are in it.”



Figure 1 – View of part of the neighbourhood of São Conrado with Rocinha in the background.

Source: Agência Globo.

Figure 1 shows a panoramic view of the landscape shared by the two neighbourhoods. The photo makes clear both their physical proximity and the social distance that distinguishes their very different forms of urban development. Setting out from this apparent paradox, our article adopts a processual perspective to reflect on how a contemporary message group for members of the São Conrado neighbourhood residents' association produce and share representations of Rocinha. Based on the idea that “cites and their representations are mutually constructed” (Gorelik 2011: 138), our aim is to understand how this specific group evokes and actualizes a particular repertoire about the neighbouring district, presenting Rocinha's territory and inhabitants as threats to the physical, moral and social integrity of São Conrado. In so doing, our aim is to contribute to an understanding of the dynamics involved in the (re)production of inequality in Rio de Janeiro, discussing how the circulation of representations effectively determines the logics of disputing and ordering urban space.

The article seeks to historicize the relationship between the two neighbourhoods, showing how, at different moments, territorial and symbolic zones of contact and friction have determined forms of interaction between their residents. This aim in mind, we proceed from the idea that space is a product of practices and disputes, and cannot be taken as a reality in itself. After all, as Simmel (2013: 75) argued: “It is not the form of spatial proximity or distance that creates the special phenomena of neighbourliness or foreignness,” since what has social importance is

not space but “the connection between parts of space, produced by spiritual factors.” The article thus sets out from the premise that space matters as a sociocultural variable, treating it as a reality materialized through the reciprocal actions that unfold within it. In this sense, we approach the neighbourhoods of Rocinha and São Conrado as territorial identities imagined, materialized and disputed through practices and representations that have taken shape over time.

The research on which this text is based was conducted using diverse sources and testimonies. Firstly, ethnographic research was undertaken over a 24-month period on the WhatsApp group of one of the São Conrado residents’ associations. Created in 2019, this group provides a forum for denunciations, complaints and suggestions, making it an important channel of communication among the neighbourhood’s residents.³ Over the last few decades, numerous studies have been dedicated to thinking about anthropological research in virtual environments, highlighting the multiple possibilities and challenges that digital and social media impose. Authors like Daniel Miller et al. (2016), Christine Hine (2015) and José Van Dijck (2007, 2013) have argued that the sociability mediated through digital environments should not be considered any less authentic than the kind established in face-to-face situations. While mediation in non-virtual interactions occurs through gestures, expressions and interjections (Goffman 1998), messaging apps involve elements like the use of upper- or lower-case letters, emojis, image sharing and so on. In this sense, online media can be thought to produce and reproduce behaviours and values, making it fertile terrain for qualitative research.

Notably, WhatsApp is the most popular mobile application in Brazil (Quitaniha 2022), widely accessed and used by people from all generations and social classes. This fact allows the platform to be taken as a space representative of the exchanges and patterns of sociability that unfold in the context of the neighbourhood residents’ association, a forum for dialogues, tensions and negotiations around a common universe of interests. However, these possibilities do not erase the limitations imposed by this type of ethnographic insertion. Such limitations include, for example, the impossibility of observing the kinds of nuances specific to non-virtual interactions (which could partly be remedied by frequenting face-to-face meetings organised by the residents association), the fact that not all messages are read by everyone, and the many restrictions on the researcher’s interaction with group members, since it is not an environment suitable for questions or in-depth discussion of the issues raised.

We also used periodicals as a research tool, examining them as fields of dispute and negotiation between different social actors (Pereira 2016). In addition, we consulted minutes of the Municipal Council and tenure documentation,⁵ which contain numerous records on the

acquisition of the Rocinha farm estate by the firm Companhia Castro Guidão and its subsequent subdivision of the land into lots, revealing the logic of control in the process of occupying the city that the municipal government attempted to implement.

The text is divided into four parts in addition to this introduction. In the first, we present the material gathered on the WhatsApp group of the São Conrado residents' association, discussing how the members' representations of Rocinha articulate the dynamics involved in constructing identities, territorialities and inequalities. Next, we present a brief history of Rocinha, showing its process of affirmation in Rio's urban space. In the third section we examine some of the landmarks in São Conrado's urbanization, reflecting on how its territory was associated with the presence of Rio's elite from the outset. Finally, in our concluding remarks, we go over the arguments developed in the article to outline a broader analytic leap concerning the processes responsible for (re)producing inequalities in urban contexts.

“We're being swallowed”

In July 2016, on the eve of the opening of the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro, residents of Rocinha and São Conrado celebrated some welcome news: the inauguration of a metro station situated in the area where the two neighbourhoods meet. Presented as one of the most important legacies of the Olympics, the station was part of the expansion project for this mode of transport⁴ and represented an important infrastructural improvement for a region well-known for its relative isolation via road from the South Zone in one direction and Barra da Tijuca in the other.

Despite the satisfaction with the new station, it was not all positive. A few weeks before the inauguration, controversy over the name of the metro station dominated the news coverage. The dispute arose after the State Transport Secretary announced that the facility would be named São Conrado Station. Unhappy with the omission of their neighbourhood from the name of this important landmark in the integrated transport network, Rocinha's residents began to mobilize. The following declaration of Fernando Ermiro, a social activist and former resident of Rocinha, sums up the main arguments made by those calling for the station's name to be changed to Rocinha/São Conrado: “A place where almost one hundred thousand people live and yet has no representation. What we're demanding is no more than legitimacy because there is so much tradition there. Rocinha has existed since the 1920s and is much older than São Conrado. They can't just ignore that.”⁵

As well as the name change, an online petition called for one of the access points close to the community to receive a plaque in homage to the *bica das almas*, the ‘fountain of souls’

an old water source that had supplied the favela and was situated at the location of one of the metro entrances. According to the petition, it was “a fight for something symbolic”: after all, “Rocinha and São Conrado share the same geographic space, express the diversity of Brazilian society, and both must be represented equally.”⁶ Despite obtaining almost 2000 signatures, the petition was unsuccessful. The only concession made by the State Transport Secretary was to include the name São Conrado/Rocinha at one of the three entrances to the station (the access closest to the favela). This measure did not satisfy the campaigners who, as another resident of the community declared, believed that the change would have been a crucial step towards valorising the identity of favela residents, allowing them to “feel that they belong to the city and also that the city belongs to them” (Silva 2016).



Figure 2 – Entrance A to São Conrado Station

Source: photo taken by the authors (2023).

In interviews conducted at the height of the controversy, São Conrado residents proved to be oblivious to the issue. Most stated that they were unaware of the mobilization by Rocinha’s residents. In general, they celebrated the arrival of the metro in the neighbourhood, not only for improving mobility but also as a factor increasing the area’s real estate value. One of the most striking statements came from a woman living in a condominium close to the Rocinha entrance, who said that the biggest benefit of the metro was the fact that ‘they’ (pointing to the favela visible from her apartment window) would start to “walk below ground, inside the station,” thus becoming less visible to those walking through São Conrado.

In March 2020, one of the researchers joined a WhatsApp group formed by members of a São Conrado residents' association. Called 'Fórum Participativo,' the group has a membership of 256 people living in various parts of São Conrado and announces in its description that its objective is to "discuss issues of interest to the neighbourhood." Messages are exchanged daily and revolve around everyday topics such as denunciations of irregularities, demands for greater security and the announcement of developments and events in the neighbourhood. Among these issues, one topic stands out due to its huge recurrence: Rocinha. Overall, the messages referring to the favela can be divided into three main themes: urban disorder, incivility and decline in the surrounding real estate value. Although these themes appear interconnectedly, separating them allows us to comprehend how the group articulates and actualizes a fairly cohesive repertoire of representations about the neighbouring district, mobilizing arguments that converge on a hegemonically negative view of Rocinha and its residents.

Urban disorder is the issue that most galvanizes the group's members. Focused on the area surrounding the metro entrance, the zone of contact between the two neighbourhoods, the messages convey a tone of denunciation and revolt. These complaints basically revolve around two issues: the presence of informal commerce and the circulation of motorcycles and vans. 'Disorder' (sometimes replaced by the term *bagunça*, mess)⁷ is one of the expressions most frequently used in the group. Employed as a neutral technical-scientific category, the term expresses a normative consensus about the forms and uses of urban space tacitly shared by members of the forum. Along these lines, there are frequent calls for the residents' association to contact the Public Order Department and the South Zone Subprefecture, identified as the bodies responsible for combating 'urban chaos.' In this recourse to technical terminology, it is not difficult to perceive the use of urbanism as a class strategy, revealing actions (or intentions) in the sphere of planning through a situated vision of the city and the urban (Lefebvre 2008: 145). Such is shown by the series of messages sent by one member of the forum, a 61-year-old man, for whom the problem represented by Rocinha is not limited to the area around the metro station. "The mess has 70,000 residents," he said.

The theme of urban disorder is frequently associated with complaints about the supposed "lack of respect and civility"⁸ of Rocinha's residents. This accusation appeared in an exchange of messages in September 2021, set off by an episode reported by one of the group's most active members, a woman aged 66, a resident of the apartment block closest to the favela community. On this day, as usual, she shared on the forum her annoyance over the loud sound coming from 'Lower Rocinha' (*Baixo Rocinha*, a term commonly used to refer to the area around the metro entrance). According to her, the 'disorder' had begun with "one cart,

one stall, then another, until it turned into a meeting point, with loud music 24 hours a day! A total mess!” Amid dozens of messages of support, one member of the group described the region in question as “an inferno, an assault on São Conrado’s residents.” Another member was just as emphatic, claiming that there had been an “involution of the habits of the Rocinha folk.” A final diagnosis closed the discussion: “They have no limits.”⁹

The idea of a ‘limit’ appears as an important category ordering the worldview of the forum’s members. Following Geertz (1989), we refer to the worldview of this WhatsApp group as a “picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society.” This picture contains the most comprehensive ideas of the group concerning order and, Geertz adds, becomes “emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression” (Geertz 1989: 93).

Based on their shared worldview, the forum’s participants amalgamate the territorial and behavioural dimensions, exchanging numerous messages in which they make the demand for clear borders between the two neighbourhoods the core of their action in the group and, not infrequently, the very meaning of the group. This becomes apparent in messages claiming that the urban disorder in the streets inside Rocinha “isn’t our problem” or that “one thing is the mess inside Rocinha, now, outside... it’s unacceptable.”¹⁰ It is also worth noting that the perception of a blurring of the boundaries between the neighbourhoods is often evoked through the idea of the favela ‘advancing’ over São Conrado. The frequent references to Rocinha as a living organism are not accidental, therefore, as in the messages asserting that it “has already taken over this section,” “it’s invading the sidewalks in our direction,”¹¹ spreading “like a cancer, new cells appearing every day.” The perception seems to be one and the same: “we’re being swallowed.”

In conversations like these, the forum’s members engage in a clear movement of (re)producing territoriality, here understood as “the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena, and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area” (Sack 1986: 19). This implies that the limits evoked by the group’s members are not innocent, arbitrary or natural (Raffestin 1993: 170). On the contrary, they are part of a game of social reproduction in which the establishment and communication of borders play a fundamental role, manifested in both material terms (delimiting, for instance, how far Rocinha’s residences may ‘advance’) and symbolic terms (making explicit which practices are permitted within the territory that they aim to control). The production of territorialities (and consequently the establishment of limits and borders) is thus part of a broader movement of classifying persons, things and behaviours, submitting them to normative controls based on belonging to a particular territory.

The relational nature of territorialities allows us to understand the insistence with which São Conrado's residents look to differentiate themselves from Rocinha, in a continuous exercise of (re)composing borders. This is the sense of a message sent in March 2022 in which a resident asserted that “the BIGGEST MISTAKE people make is thinking that society there is just the same as here. It's a parallel universe.”¹² By contrasting the two neighbourhoods through the image of a civilizational abyss, the message reestablishes frontiers at a symbolic level that appear much more fluid at a physical level.

The vast literature on favelas shows that this is far from an isolated case. Researchers have been reflecting on the causes and effects of the apparently paradoxical relationship between the physical proximity and social distance between favelas and middle/upper-class neighbourhoods, giving analytic shape to a phenomenon that, though present in many parts of Brazil, is dramatically expressed in Rio de Janeiro. Although exploring different analytical proposals and empirical frameworks, their works have invested in the deconstruction of a dichotomous vision of favela communities and their surrounding neighbourhoods, showing that this is based in large part on the systematic association of favelas with illegality, whether in terms of land occupation or the everyday practice of their residents.

Gonçalves (2007), for example, argues that the opposition between ‘favela’ and ‘asphalt’ became cemented after the 1937 Building Code (*Código de Obras*). According to the author, by treating favelas as an ‘urban aberration’ to be erased, the decree – which was the first official document to deal with this type of housing – defined them as temporary settlements, legitimizing the lack of public investments in these spaces (Gonçalves 2007). Along similar lines, Burgos argues that, growing on the margins of state action, the favelas reached the final decades of the twentieth century strongly associated with a broad repertoire of negative connotations, becoming consolidated as “antonyms of the city and everything that modernity attributes to it: urbanity, hygiene, a work ethic, progress and civility” (Burgos 2005: 190). Ribeiro and Lago (2001), for their part, question the idea that Rio de Janeiro is a city divided between favela and asphalt, informal housing and planned developments. Pursuing this critique, the authors reflect on the “intense production of images, ideas and practices that rework the old myth of the favela as another social world separate from the city, different, identified by lack and disorganisation” (2001: 145). In conclusion, they identify the ‘symbolic expropriation’ of favela residents as the cause of their transformation into ‘social outcasts’ who live, according to many, in a social order deemed legally unacceptable (ibid: 154).

The abundance of messages on the forum that sought to question the legitimacy of Rocinha's very existence, viewing it as the result of an accumulation of illegalities over time, is thus unsurprising.

This is what one member of the group suggested, a resident of São Conrado for 50 years: “Rocinha began with the leniency of the residents who felt sorry for the northeasterners who arrived here with nowhere to live and started to put up shacks; and today we have what we have.” Echoing this view, another member, a woman who had lived in the neighbourhood for 40 years, stated that “were it a legally constituted neighbourhood, there would be no problem. The question is living with this permissiveness and illegality.”¹³ Concurring with her, another resident asked: “How can these invasions be officially recognized as ‘neighbourhoods’ when they don’t even pay the IPTU tax?”

The question of the Urban Building and Land Tax (*Imposto Predial e Territorial Urbano*: IPTU) appears frequently as a materialization of the inequality of rights that, according to the group’s members, defines the relationship between the residents of the two neighbourhoods. Complaints that they pay high taxes “to keep the favelas running” or to “support the perks of the favelas” are fairly common.¹⁴ Linked to this is the constant concern with the devaluation of their properties. The topic gives rise to a collective exercise of measuring the economic damage caused by the presence of Rocinha, especially in the case of the condominiums closest to the favela: “Imagine the price of the apartments if the view from them was all greenery, without Rocinha... there wouldn’t be an apartment for less than 1.5 million.” For many members, the apartment blocks located opposite the entrance to the favela had already been “abducted by Rocinha,” their owners left to resign themselves to the fact, since the value of their properties would no longer allow them to move to another part of the city.

These complaints, however, do not indicate a process of forming what Cavalcanti (2011) called a ‘liminal market’ in which the property values of the favela and the so-called ‘formal’ city merge. As the author stresses, in cases like São Conrado, marked by strong social contrast, this phenomenon seldom occurs. Even so, the residents’ perception that their properties are gradually losing their value enables us to think of the real estate market as a social phenomenon in which economic calculations are interconnected with the production of more subjective values, linked to the dimension of affects and the personal trajectory of localized and singular social subjects. In this sense, the way in which the group’s members thematize the question of the value of their properties allows us to reflect on “historical discontinuities in the production of space and socio-spatial segregation in the city from the perspective of memory and the social meanings attributed to urban space” (Cavalcanti 2011: 23).

Indeed, the representations of Rocinha that circulate on the WhatsApp group reveal strategies for producing space strongly linked to the dynamics of sociospatial segregation. The numerous complaints referring to the neighbouring district reflect the collective construction of spatialities,

temporalities and memories that give shape to a remarkably cohesive repertoire of representations of the favela and its inhabitants. Rather than taking this repertoire as the absolute expression of a dualist opposition, it is important to understand it as part of a broader process of producing hierarchies, composed of tensions and disputes that are always in motion. This is what we shall do later.

“A divided city”

In the first half of the 1920s, the newspapers *Correio da Manhã* and *Jornal do Brasil* published various brief news reports announcing the opportunity to purchase lots in a property called Fazenda da Rocinha (Rocinha Farm), located in the district of Gávea (*Correio da Manhã*, 10/10/1922; 19/12/1922; 10/1/1923; *Jornal do Brasil*, 18/1/1924; 19/1/1924; 3/2/1924). Situated on “Estrada da Gávea [the Gávea Highway], on land measuring 554,500m²,” the terrain was divided into lots by Castro Guidão & Companhia, a company owned by two Portuguese brothers who had settled in Rio de Janeiro at the end of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Although it had acquired prestige and recognition in what was then the Federal District, the company ran into financial difficulties at the start of the 1920s (*Jornal do Brasil*, 28/10/1925; 25/11/1925; *A Noite*, 20/12/1923; *Gazeta de Notícias*, 1/10/1926), leading its owners to sell off some of its assets, the Fazenda da Rocinha among them. In a document from 1936, already in the throes of bankruptcy, the company’s liquidator replied to the city council’s questions about the lack of planning in the land development, revealing the reasoning of its directors:

More than ten years ago [...] they tried to subdivide [...] this property to sell the lots over the long term, in monthly instalments that at that time could not be high but were affordable for people with limited means who were willing to accept the obstacles [...] of living in a more remote location without easy and cheap transportation (trams or buses), the lack of electricity, water and sewers.¹⁶

By associating the ease of payment for the plots with the precarious services offered by the public authorities in the area, the document makes clear that the development was aimed at low-income workers. At that time, the area was still far from the urban centres and public services were almost non-existent, resulting in a certain laxity of the authorities in relation to the buildings that were starting to set the pattern for the region’s urban occupation. As a result, already in the early 1930s, the Rocinha Farm was becoming consolidated as a place for the working classes to live. Not by chance, in 1931, the newspaper *Beira-Mar* (25/5/1930) presented Rocinha as a “working class neighbourhood” inhabited by “five thousand souls,” constituting a pole of attraction for workers from various parts of the city.

The densification of housing soon caught the attention of the public authorities. In 1936, the councillor Tito Lívio announced in the Municipal Council the creation of a campaign “against the exploiters of the clandestine sale of land in the Federal District” (*Jornal do Brasil* 1936).¹⁷ The initiative was aimed at the subdivision of large rural properties by private companies, taking the case of Companhia Castro Guidão as an example:

The land companies want to be completely uncontrolled; they don't want to be supervised in any way; they want to sell the plots of land, like those that were sold in 'Rocinha,' without approval of the subdivision, without any technical conditions, in hypothetical addresses and non-existent roads.

The councillor's discourse proceeds to make clear the concern with the emergence of a substantial nucleus of low-income housing in the region. Denouncing the “extremely irregular situation” of the housing, Lívio presented the Rocinha as the result of the interest of “a few tycoons” and the inaction of the Directorate of Works, who allowed “this settlement to grow haphazardly.”

Tito Lívio was not the only politician to turn his attention to Rocinha that day. In the same session, the councillor Alceo de Carvalho also mentioned the growing poor population occupying the region and the precariousness of the basic services available there. Although sensitive to the plight of the residents, the councillor asked whether the implementation of improvements in public services might not culminate in the consolidation of the “irregular nucleus” that, in his words, formed “a perfect contrast with our city and civilization” (*Jornal do Brasil* 1936). Mentioning the legal disputes over land in Rocinha, Alceo de Carvalho argued for the expropriation of irregular plots, emphasizing the region's potential at a time when tourism in the city was no longer limited to the centre but also encompassed the South Zone's coastline and its natural attractions.¹⁸ Rocinha became the target of diverse projects and interests, which developed from the perception of its tourist and real estate potential for wealthy social groups during the early 1930s.

Despite these interests and concerns, Rocinha became consolidated in the city's landscape and cartography. It is interesting to note, for example, that Tito Lívio specified that the nucleus of its dwellings was situated “between Pedra da Gávea, and Pedra dos Dois Irmãos, and Pedra do Macaco and Morro Laburiaux [referring to a series of local mountains], and traversed by the Estrada da Gávea highway” (*Jornal do Brasil* 1936), in a description that amplified the perception of his contemporaries concerning Rocinha's spatial limits. This amplification can be explained by the fact that other nucleuses of workers' housing already existed in the region at that time, such as Vila Gondolo, close to Morro Laburiaux (Costa 2022). Some of his contemporaries, whose experience was far removed from the everyday life of these residents, may have begun to

identify these clusters of dwellings as parts of Rocinha too, in a process that began to redefine the favela's sociospatial boundaries in relation to the rest of the city.

It is also notable that the councillor identified Rocinha as an “immense and abandoned ‘favela,’” using a classificatory term not yet commonly associated with the locality. In doing so, he attributed a specific set of meanings to the occupation, challenging how the locality was conceived within Rio's urban imaginary. Once denominated a ‘favela,’ Rocinha became part of a series of occupations that, since the second half of the 1920s, had been linked to illegality, as well as identified as an aesthetic, hygienic and social problem that needed to be eradicated from the Federal District (Gonçalves 2013: 98-100). Rocinha became delineated as a problem for the public authorities, a process that directly affected the way in which its residents began to be perceived and how they started to act in relation both to the state and to Rio society in general.

An example of this change was the measure taken in 1937 by some buyers of plots sold by Companhia Castro Guidão, who attempted to legalize their situation with the General Directorate of Finance. Such was the case of Maria Benedicta, who “having purchased the land from Castro Guidão & Companhia on the odd-numbered side located on Estrada da Gávea n. 359 lot n. 97,” had made a “request to Your Excellency for the plot to be transferred to her name.” In reply, the city council indicated that the decision would depend on the “completion of the plan on the scale of 1:5000 to prove that the area did in fact belong to Castro, Guidão & Cia.” At the end of a dispute that lasted until 1944, the date of the last official letter submitted in her name, Maria Benedicta seems to have given up on pursuing the application further, as indicated by the archiving of the case by the municipal office.¹⁹

Symptomatically, in January 1944 a decree law signed by the mayor of the Federal District at the time, Henrique Dodsworth, ordered the expropriation of dwellings located in the “zone adjacent to Estrada da Gávea.”²⁰ Although not made clear in the document, a columnist from the *Gazeta de Notícias* explained that the target of the measure was the “place called Rocinha” (*Gazeta de Notícias* 1944). Proclaiming “the need to urbanize the zone adjacent to the Estrada da Gávea highway in order to match its tourist potential,” the act aimed to extinguish the occupation, expropriating the buildings and lands for “public use.”²¹ It was clear that the decree intended to eradicate Rocinha's nucleus of habitations to meet the expectations of the real estate market whose interests seemed incompatible with the continued presence of the workers living in the region.

Months later, however, the mayor revoked the measure. The annulment of the decree occurred in the context of a weakening of the Estado Novo, which would culminate a year later in the collapse of the regime. Combined with the political difficulties, the mobilization of the residents also

contributed to the outcome when they made their discontent known to the authorities (*A Manhã* 1945). It is important to remember that the decision to revoke the eviction did not result in greater attention from the public authorities to the needs of the residents. This becomes clear in a newspaper report published in 1950 by *Tribuna da Imprensa*, in which Rocinha was presented as “an agglomeration of small houses and shacks of every kind, forming something akin to a separate city”:

Geographically the place is pleasant. From a demographic viewpoint, however, the area faces some of the most serious and deep-set problems. Without electricity or any kind of policing, the 7,000 people who live in the locality (higher than the population of many rural towns) have gradually seen the tranquil life they once knew evaporate. Rarely a day goes by without some fight, brawl or gambling going on in ‘Rocinha’, very often provoked by outsiders who, well aware of the lack of policing, travel there taking alcoholic drinks and the like with them. Due to its distance from Rio’s urban centre, ‘Rocinha’ lends itself to every kind of bad behaviour. There are card games, macumbas [Afro-Brazilian religions], one of which is traditionally known and frequented by high society people. . . The shacks grow day by day. The men, coming from other parts of the city or the interior, usually arrive alone. They build a little house and a few days later bring the entire family. Poverty is widespread. (*Tribuna da Imprensa* 1950)

The description shows us how the idea that Rocinha was formed “like a city apart” was rooted in a double perception: firstly, the size of the occupation, which at the time numbered around 7,000 people (more than “many rural towns”); secondly, the peculiarity of the habits, constructions, types and practices, which made the locality a *sui generis* reality in the eyes of the journalist. By presenting the constant ‘brawls’ and ‘gambling’, the journalist presents a reality alien to the codes of civility, an idea materialized in the description of Rocinha as somewhere distant from “Rio’s urban centre,” making it subject to “every kind of bad behaviour.” On the other hand, in remarking that one of the city’s famous *macumbas* was found there, the author adds that it was frequented by “high society people,” revealing that although it might appear a separate world, Rocinha was a constitutive part of the urban dynamic of what was then the national capital.

Another dimension mentioned in the article is the question of land ownership. The author recalls the beginning of the occupation when “some three hundred or so families” bought plots from Companhia Castro Guedes but had not received the title deeds. He adds that the company had also failed to comply with the requirements set by the city council, such as opening roads and implementing other urbanization works. Engulfed in irregularities, the occupation of Rocinha had culminated in a highly precarious situation, which ended up stimulating invasions of the company’s land and nearby areas in a process that was still accelerating.

Contrary to representations like these, which pointed to Rocinha as the opposite of the city or even as an obstacle to its development, the favela’s occupation was irrevocably intertwined with Rio de Janeiro’s urban growth. A direct result of real estate speculation, Rocinha had been

consolidated as a housing region before neighbourhoods like Gávea and São Conrado, formed later on lands contiguous with those occupied by low-income workers in the first decades of the twentieth century. Far from comprising a succession of illegalities, Rocinha's occupation was marked by the constant action of its residents and their attempts to assert and contest their position and their rights, whether those linked to land ownership or those related to citizenship, drawing the attention of public authorities to the neighbourhood's problems.

Between 1950 and 1960, Rocinha's population rose from 4,513 to 14,569 people, causing the favela to extend far beyond the space originally subdivided into lots by Companhia Castro Guidão (Costa 2022). The rapid growth was fed by the flows of migrants that intensified within the country over the 1940s and 50s, coming from Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo, as well as increasingly from Brazil's Northeast region (Fontes 2008: 46). In the 1960s and 70s, the implementation of road infrastructure works connecting the South Zone to other areas of the city generated work opportunities in the region, leading many people to see Rocinha as a place to live. In 2010, census data showed that Rocinha was Brazil's largest favela.²²

Knowing the history of Rocinha's occupation allows us to take a critical look at the affirmation strategies that permeated the occupation of São Conrado, many of them based on the premise of an opposition between a formal (and thus legitimate) neighbourhood and an informal (and thus supposedly invasive) one. In the next section, we discuss some of these strategies, thinking about how they relate to the process of occupying the region of the city in question.

"A Brazilian Beverly Hills"

There are few mentions of the São Conrado neighbourhood (or Gávea Beach, as it was long known) in Rio's press before the 1940s. In 1904, the construction of a chapel on land donated by Commander Conrado Niemeyer led to the region appearing in short reports in the newspapers, indicating that the initiative was aimed at wealthy families who lived in nearby country houses (*Jornal do Brasil*, 18/7/1904). This was not enough to define the social profile of the region's inhabitants, though. During the first decades of the twentieth century, some news stories can be found linking the area to drowned fishermen, fights among workers and the sale of grass, revealing a highly diverse occupation with little integration into the urban fabric of the rest of the city.

Two decades went by until, in 1926, the inauguration of the Gávea Golf and Country Club put São Conrado on the map of Rio's high society. The new venue brought the neighbourhood to the social columns and classified ads of the periodicals, which announced the new club's balls, teas and tournaments, as well as the sale and rental of comfortable houses around the new venue,

always with large grounds and a garage. Shortly afterwards, the newspapers began to publish advertisements for a new housing development in São Conrado. Baptized Gavelândia, the project conceived by the company Land Investment Trust S.A promised to build “a luxury garden city,” “scientifically urbanized” in an “English style” (*Vida Doméstica*, 1/10/1932). In sum, it was designed to be an “exclusive neighbourhood” where only “the city’s social aristocracy” would live (*Correio da Manhã*, 1932). However, these advertisements concealed an important detail: the land was located at the “start of Estrada da Gávea” (*Correio da Manhã*, 26/3/1933), close to the Rocinha housing nucleus. Not by accident, the ads placed heavy emphasis on the fact that “they are not plots for the poor” (*Correio da Manhã*, 1932), but were intended for “the cream of Rio society” (*Correio da Manhã*, 26/10/1932). Revealed between the lines was the dispute over the meaning of the occupation of this space with the expansion of developments like Gavelândia, on one hand, and housing areas allocated to the working classes, on the other, including the likes of Rocinha Farm, sold in the previous decade by Companhia Castro Guidão.

The successive advertisements for land in Gavelândia show the difficulties that the company faced in associating the region with an aristocratic occupation. This becomes even clearer in a news story published in 1935, in which a reader denounced the existence of a ‘clandestine bar,’ a meeting place for ‘vagabonds,’ in the development’s plots. The same reader also complained about the existence of “a filthy shed” in the locality, “whose owner lets cows, pigs and chickens loose on the public roads” (*Diário de Notícias*, 1935). The testimony tells us that the area was inhabited by low-income workers and that, despite the efforts of the Land Investment Trust S.A., it became consolidated as working-class neighbourhood. In fact, the development project never left the drawing board and at the end of the 1930s mentions of Gavelândia no longer appeared in the newspapers.

However, the failure of the upmarket housing development did not mean the end of the real estate market’s ambitions for São Conrado. The area became the target of diverse projects and interests, which developed from a perception of its tourist and real estate potential for wealthy social groups, especially in the regions furthest from the entrance to Rocinha. The proliferation of advertisements in the leading newspapers in the 1940s and 50s suggests a strong real estate growth during the period, when São Conrado began to be presented as the “new neighbourhood of the South Zone” (*Jornal do Brasil* 1950). Repeating the strategy employed successfully decades earlier in Copacabana (O’Donnell 2013), São Conrado was presented as a promising investment opportunity given the ‘natural’ growth of the city in its direction.

São Conrado arrived in the 1960s as a promise of the future and a new front for urban expansion, attracting young artists who saw the location as a good place to live far from the

hardships of the ‘city.’²³ Not by chance, in 1967 the magazine *O Cruzeiro* dubbed the neighbourhood the “Brazilian Beverly Hills,” referring to the luxurious Californian city famous for its film star mansions. Also contributing to its fame places bars like Bar Bem and Bar do Joá, frequented by well-known figures from Rio’s bohemian scene, and establishments like Drive-in Namore Modernamente, which made São Conrado “synonymous with secret encounters, forbidden couples and also a lot of romance” (*O Cruzeiro* 1957).

At urban planning level, São Conrado came to be seen as the “great gateway to the new city being built in Barra da Tijuca” (*O Globo* 1968). On the eve of presenting the Pilot Plan for the urbanization and zoning of Baixada de Jacarepaguá and Barra da Tijuca (designed in 1969 by urban planner Lúcio Costa), the neighbourhood emerged as an important road and landscape connection between the old and prestigious South Zone and the new and promising West Zone, where the both press and the public authorities foresaw the solution for the city’s future (Alves 2021, O’Donnell, Sampaio & Cavalcanti 2020). This vocation would be realised in 1971 with the inauguration of the Lagoa-Barra Highway, linking Gávea to São Conrado, and the Joá Overpass, connecting São Conrado to Barra da Tijuca. Together these works would consolidate the expansion of the flow of road traffic between the South and West Zones, transforming São Conrado into a obligatory passageway for the growing number of people travelling between the two regions.²⁴ In Figure 3, taken shortly before the highway’s inauguration, we can see various houses that formed part of Rocinha located near to the Zuzu Angel tunnel entrance. It is clear that, though unmentioned in the many reports celebrating the construction work, the favela was an integral part of the new infrastructure, composing both its landscape and its everyday life.

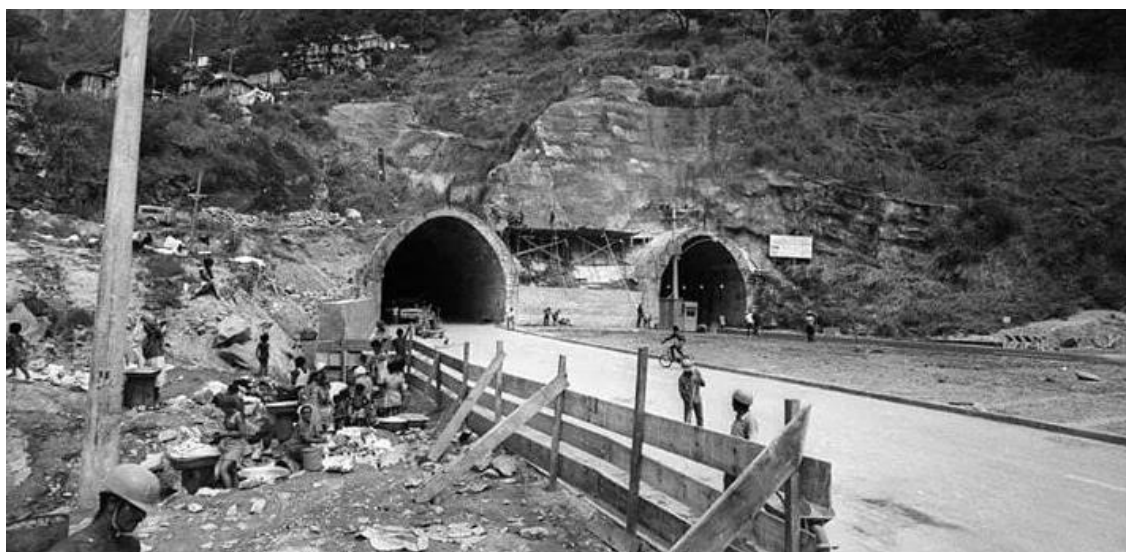


Figure 3 – Construction of the Zuzu Angel tunnel, 1971.

Source: Agência Globo.

The expansion of the road network integrating the neighbourhood was accompanied by the opening of the Hotel Nacional in 1972. With its architectural project developed by Oscar Niemeyer and gardens designed by Burle Marx, the development placed São Conrado on the luxury tourism map, rivalling Copacabana Palace for the title of best hotel in Latin America (Lucena 2019). The new developments drew more and more people to the neighbourhood, transforming it into a good business opportunity and attracting entrepreneurs from different sectors. Over the following years, São Conrado acquired new leisure venues, including a bowling alley, kart track and amusement park, as well as new housing with the emergence of large condominiums that would become the main hallmark of its urbanization.

Celebrated for its “rude beauty” (*O Globo* 1973), the neighbourhood emerged from the advertisements for the new condominiums as “a select sample of Rio de Janeiro” (*O Globo* 1974). Sérgio Dourado, builder of one of the neighbourhood’s largest condominiums, described São Conrado as “the natural, inevitable, immediate extension of the South Zone,” predicting that it had “everything to be Rio’s new sophisticated neighbourhood” (*O Globo* 1975). In 1981, the inauguration of the Fashion Mall shopping complex would crown the intention of making São Conrado “the geographic centre of the city’s highest income” (*O Globo* 1981). More than the observation of an objective reality, this repertoire corresponds to a set of ideas and practices that, in a collective effort, aimed over the long term to give São Conrado a specific identity in the physical and symbolic cartography of the city. In this respect, it is worth turning to the reflections of Cordeiro and Costa (1999) for whom neighbourhoods constitute problematic sociospatial units in themselves, since the aspects of symbolic unity contained in the representations that give them meaning tend to conceal an infinite number of social processes and codes established through different ways of using and signifying space. In a similar vein, Gravano (2003) proposes thinking of neighbourhoods as symbolic and ideological spaces that acquire and construct values, consisting of referents to urban social identities, which he calls *barriais* (from *bairro*, neighbourhood). The *barrial* identity is expressed, he suggests, in a way of positioning oneself in relation to the passing of historical time and also of relating to others (including defining who these others are).

These considerations allow us to reflect on the erasure of Rocinha and its residents in the composition of the ideas and images that delineated a distinct and exclusive profile for São Conrado. Despite its absence from representations of the neighbourhood, the favela imposed itself from the start of its occupation as part of the landscape and the population composing its everyday life. It is essential, therefore, to analyse against the grain the same newspapers in which these advertisements and news stories were published, looking for clues to how São Conrado’s relationship

with Rocinha was constructed over the process of the former's urbanization. In doing so, we discover that, in 1957, the magazine *Manchete* claimed that the neighbourhood's inhabitants lived in close proximity with the "dense population of Rocinha village" (7/4/1956). In the same period it is common to find images in the press that stigmatize the favela and its residents, published in news stories that associate them with marginality, crime, incivility and urban disorder.

As early as the 1950s, various reports described Rocinha as a blemish on São Conrado. This is the case of an article in the newspaper *Última Hora* from 1956, which claimed that the "neighbourhood of mansions of yesterday," which had "grown peaceful" until now, had seen its "happy history" interrupted by the "growth of the Rocinha favela, where, amid an unhappy proletariat [...], dangerous robbers and criminals hide who come down to the neighbourhood" (9/12/1956). In another text, the same newspaper described Rocinha as a "poorly urbanized and even less hygienic agglomeration," which was growing in an "uncontrolled proliferation" (10/12/1956). Along the same lines, criticisms abounded of the city council's tolerance in relation to the building of new shacks, whose presence threatened the real estate value of the surrounding houses (*Diário da Noite* 1958).

In the period from the mid-twentieth century to the present, it is possible to note the gradual consolidation in the press of the idea of a 'contrast' to refer to the relationship between the two neighbourhoods. Especially from the 1980s onwards, articles began to appear that described the relationship between Rocinha and São Conrado using expressions such as "the two faces of one neighbourhood," "a space of contradictions" (*O Globo* 1988) or "opposites that meet" (*O Globo* 1997). It is important to note that the idea of a contrast, commonly illustrated by photos that show the overlapping of shacks and mansions in a layered landscape, is accompanied by reports that present Rocinha as a place "feared by many," reinforcing the idea that the physical proximity between the two neighbourhoods is inversely proportional to their social distance. This is suggested, for example, by an article from 1988 in which São Conrado's apartments are described as "highly luxurious" properties with a "panoramic view of the war" (*O Globo* 1988); or another in which the view of Rocinha from the balconies of São Conrado is compared to a "primitive painting" (*O Globo* 1988).

However, the image of the radical separation of two realities that the landscape insists on bringing together collides with the many news articles showing the (in)tense coexistence between the residents of the two neighbourhoods. In 1988, the newspaper *O Globo* published the text "The harsh life of the neighbours of Rocinha favela" (24/6/1998) in which São Conrado is described as the 'playground' of the community in a clear criticism of the occupation of the formal urban space by the favela's residents. Tension also appears in a report on the conflict generated by the installation of a temporary amusement park close to the entrance to

Rocinha. While, on one hand, the favela residents argued that “the poor also have a right to fun,” on the other, São Conrado’s inhabitants asked: “if the mess (*mafuá*) is theirs, why was it installed in São Conrado?” (*O Globo* 1996).

Rather than confirming the image of two separate worlds, these examples show that Rocinha and São Conrado have been, from the outset, in a permanent state of negotiating reality (Velho 1994), in a relationship whose constitutive element is difference (and the permanent possibility of confrontation). It is important to consider, however, that this difference operates in a context of shared meanings, in which the senses of belonging to a common urban space and, no less importantly, the ways of transforming it are disputed. Even though most of the reports emphasize the differences between neighbourhoods, participating as an agent in the demarcation of boundaries between them, it is possible to find clues telling us that, at the level of everyday life, the reality is much more complex. This is shown by the many news reports observing the fact that most of the employees of São Conrado’s homes and hotels are residents of Rocinha, or the articles that relate the increase in violence in São Conrado to Rocinha’s growth. In one of these articles, on being asked about the phenomenon, the blacksmith Arlindo, a favela inhabitant, states: “Those who rob in São Conrado are not from Rocinha, I can assure you. Down there [in São Conrado] they also have *biroscas* [small bars] and a lot of *malandragem* [bad or criminal behaviour], because it isn’t just rich folk living in that neighbourhood” (*O Globo* 1981).

Comparing the content of the newspaper articles with the messages exchanged on the WhatsApp group, we can see that the tensions marking the relationship between the two neighbourhoods have been renewed around the same themes for at least eight decades. However, the continuity of these themes does not imply the perception of a static relationship. On the contrary: it reveals a dynamic marked by the permanent friction (Tsing 2004) between projects and practices that adapt to each other on a daily basis in a constant movement of shaping space and the lives and meanings produced there. The testimonies show us that the arrangements and boundaries that sustain the terms of this relationship are challenged continually, and it is in this sense that, as Tsing (2004) argues, friction keeps the structures in motion, allowing the opening of gaps through which conflicts and negotiations are established, making possible the emergence of new spatial configurations and, simultaneously, new forms of interaction.

This is especially visible around the entrance to Rocinha where different moralities and logics of urban planning overlap, configuring what Arantes (1994) called a symbolic transition zone. There, issues like noise, the use of sidewalks and informal commerce tend to provoke constant conflicts, forming a particularly dense area from the viewpoint of the “interplay of interrelated

territorialities” (Arantes 1994: 192). In this sense, we can say that this region operates as an ambiguous frontier that separates and, at the same time, brings into contact the contrasting practice and worldviews of residents in both neighbourhoods.

Figure 4 shows the dynamics at work in the area. In the images we can observe elements of what São Conrado’s residents identify as landmarks of the planned city – like the metro station and some apartment blocks – interwoven with practices recognized by them as signs of urban chaos – like the motorcycle taxis, alternative transport vans and various kinds of street vendors.



Figure 4 – Region around the metro station in October 2023.

Source: Photos taken by the authors.

A clear example of the density that Arantes (1994) describes – and the frictions deriving from it – was an event that occurred precisely in this locality on 9 April 2023, when a São Conrado resident verbally and physically assaulted two app delivery riders, residents of Rocinha, who were taking a break sat in front of a local store. Alleging that they were making improper use of the neighbourhood’s sidewalks, hindering the movement of pedestrians, the resident resorted to violence, even using her dog’s lead to whip one of the deliverers. Among the stream of abuse shouted by her, it is possible to hear phrases like “You’re not in the favela, I’m the one who pays land tax here!” and “Go back to the favela!” (Durães 2023). A video of the episode quickly went viral on social media, causing uproar and receiving extensive coverage in Brazil’s mainstream media. Strongly racist in connotation, the resident’s attitude was promptly condemned by public opinion, which rapidly identified the unmistakable traits of a society marked by deep racial and class inequalities.

In the forum of the São Conrado residents’ association, however, the repercussions were different. Though condemning the ‘excesses’ practiced by the aggressor, most members saw the episode as an opportunity to reaffirm a collective feeling of indignation at the ‘mess’ affecting the area of the neighbourhood in question. This becomes clear in a message that received many expressions of support in which a resident claimed that the woman concerned “had the courage to stand up for us, since the public authorities don’t take the initiative.” In the same vein, another member stated she “had the courage to confront these people who invade the sidewalks”; a third member admitted wanting to “do the same, I just lack the courage!” At the end of the day, after hundreds of messages were exchanged on the subject, a woman summed up what much of the group seemed to be feeling: “Rocinha has come down. Unfortunately, it’s already a reality.”²⁵

Final remarks

Over the course of this article, we have analysed how the relationship between the neighbourhoods of São Conrado and Rocinha was historically configured, marked by the apparent paradox between physical proximity and social distance. Setting out to problematize the already much-explored idea of an opposition between contrasting realities, we analysed different processes in the production of territorialities that accumulated in the spatial continuum in which both neighbourhoods emerged and grew, reflecting on their ambiguities and intersections. Using press reports, official documents and messages from the São Conrado residents’ association group, we were able to reflect on the perpetuation and transformation of strategies for hierarchizing the shared space. In general, we can say that these strategies are divided into two main groups, frequently employed in conjunction: the first concentrates forms of erasing Rocinha and its residents as agents who produce

urban space; the second concentrates mechanisms for creating a symbolic opposition between the two neighbourhoods, with an emphasis on the theme of civility. As a result, it became perceptible that São Conrado's residents seek to "impose a social worldview through the principles of division" (Bourdieu 1997: 113), shaping a group identity that, through the slogan of defending the neighbourhood's interests, is forged almost exclusively in opposition to the favela and its inhabitants.

Despite its specificities, the case presented here allows us to think about broader processes of producing inequalities in urban areas. As we know, this is not a homogenous phenomenon since it is produced and manifested through specific sociospatial forms, which refer to different logics of interaction. Even so, the analysed testimonies invite us, in their gaps and contradictions, to think about the social construction of the space shared by distinct social groups, highlighting the need to "expand the traditional analysis of urban segregation, taking into account everyday practices and their distinct spheres and spaces of exchange and interaction" (Jirón 2010: 104).

This perspective moves us away from the idea of a 'mosaic city,' a legacy of the pioneering works of Chicago urban sociology in which urban space emerges as a set of relatively autonomous worlds, separated by rigid frontiers. Working in another direction, we sought to think about the processes of producing inequalities as the result of exchanges that reveal, in the context of everyday practices, hierarchies and power relations in urban space (Segura 2012: 108). From the analytic viewpoint, thinking about urban inequality in these terms challenges us to question the classifications ordering space, reflecting on limits and boundaries in light of the interactions and circulations that challenge them. This compels us, then, to pay attention to the constant attempts to rebalance forces and rearrange categories, revealing the inescapably relational, constructed and multiple character of urban space (Massey 2005).

From this perspective, the following statement, published by a member of the São Conrado residents' forum, can be read as a synthesis of many of the testimonies reproduced in this text:

Deep down I'm against Rocinha, but I have to accept it! It's not just the growth, it's the vandalism. There's no education, respect, nothing. Once again, I admit I'm against Rocinha, but I have to live with it or move away from São Conrado, I can't see any other solution! (São Conrado resident, 2022)²⁶

The message presents São Conrado and Rocinha as two antagonistic realities in a relation marked by physical incompatibility (present here in the idea of the favela's growth) and symbolic incompatibility (expressed in the ideas of 'vandalism' and an absence of 'respect'). However, it is possible to note that antagonism acquires shape through a relation of mutuality in which the two neighbourhoods appear as irremediably intertwined universes. This is revealed in the somewhat resigned declaration that even though she is 'against' Rocinha, the author

feels compelled to ‘accept’ it, since, in day-to-day terms, coexistence with the favela and its residents is not just inevitable but is also constitutive of the São Conrado neighbourhood, whether as a landscape, space or experience.

Notas

¹ Available at <https://censo2010.ibge.gov.br/>. Accessed 12 December 2023.

² Rocinha received the title of bairro (neighbourhood) in 1993 (Rio de Janeiro, 1993), acquiring its own administrative region in the process.

³ The researcher identified herself in the group in this capacity, receiving permission from the administrators to conduct the research.

⁴ Line 4 of the metro was inaugurated for the Olympic Games, linking the South Zone of the city to Barra da Tijuca in the West Zone.

⁵ Available at <https://noticias.uol.com.br/cotidiano/ultimas-noticias/2016/07/12/moradores-cobram-inclusao-do-nome-rocinha-em-futura-estacao-de-metro.htm>. Accessed 12 June 2024.

⁶ Available at https://secure.avaaz.org/community_petitions/po/Concessionaria_Rio_Barra_SA_Nomeacao_da_Estacao_RocinhaSao_Conrado_na_Linha_4_do_Metro_Rio/. Accessed 12 June 2024.

⁷ During the research period, ‘disorder’ (desordem) appeared 111 times in the group, while ‘mess’ (bagunça) had 65 occurrences.

⁸ Message sent 2 September 2021.

⁹ Messages sent 1 September 2021.

¹⁰ Message sent 1 September 2021.

¹¹ Message sent 30 July 2021.

¹² Message sent 16 October 2021. Original emphasis.

¹³ Message sent 25 September 2021.

¹⁴ Message sent 30 July 2021.

¹⁵ The newspapers mentioned in the text from this footnote onwards were used as the primary source for writing this article. Due to the unavailability of these newspapers on the internet, they will be mentioned for curiosity only, without any normative value, given the impossibility of referring to them in our bibliography. See Arquivo Geral do Rio de Janeiro, Aforamentos, Estrada da Gávea, G 9.

¹⁶ Arquivo Geral do Rio de Janeiro, Aforamentos, Estrada da Gávea, G 9.

¹⁷ The session in the Municipal Council of the Federal District took place on 3 November 1936 and was published in the *Jornal do Brasil* the next day.

¹⁸ On this point, it is worth recalling that in 1932 the Estrada da Gávea highway became part of the Rio de Janeiro City Grand Prix, the largest motoring event in the country at the time, attracting competitors and visitors from various countries. The event was held non-continuously between 1933 and 1954.

¹⁹ Arquivo Geral do Rio de Janeiro, Aforamentos, Estrada da Gávea, G 10.

²⁰ Boletim da Prefeitura do Distrito Federal. Decreto 7.711, 24 de janeiro de 1944, Ano XXXI, janeiro-junho, p. 35.

²¹ On the urban reforms during the Dodsworth administration, see Silva (2017).

²² In 2022, the national census identified the Sol Nascente favela in Brasília as Brazil’s largest, containing 32,081 habitational units. Rocinha appears in second place with 30,955 households.

²³ In 1967, São Conrado already had big names from the new generation of Brazilian artists among its residents, including Elis Regina, Edu Lobo and Roberto Menescal.

²⁴ For an analysis of the role of the Elevado do Joá (the Joá Flyover) in the material construction of the expansion of the real estate market and in the symbolic construction of social imaginaries and new urban forms, see Agueda (2023).

²⁵ Messages exchanged 9 April 2023.

²⁶ Messages sent 7 May 2022.

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JO e MC trabalharam na concepção e redação final do texto. JO trabalhou nas partes relativas a São Conrado e MC nas partes relativas à Rocinha. As demais partes foram feitas conjuntamente.

Recebido em: 11/01/2024

Aprovado em: 15/04/2024

Editor responsável: Michel Misse